

Message Text

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15/43

ACTION PM-03

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R 181053Z APR 75

FM AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3684

SECDEF WASHDC

SEC AIR FORCE WASHDC

AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN

AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE

AMEMBASSY OSLO

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY STOCKHOLM

CINCEUR

CINCUSAFE

C O N F I D E N T I A L BRUSSELS 03451

C O R R E C T E D C O P Y FOR ADDRESSEE CHANGE

COUNTRY TEAM MESSAGE

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MASS, BE

SUBJECT: F-104 REPLACEMENT

1. THE QUESTION OF WHETHER BELGIUM SHOULD BUY THE F-16 OR THE F-1 HAS BECOME A PUBLIC ISSUE WITH A VENGEANCE. REPORTS, OPINIONS, AND ARGUMENTS ARE PUBLISHED EVERY DAY. THE QUESTION HAS ALSO BECOME A FULL-FLEDGED COMMUNITY ISSUE: FRENCH SPEAKING BELGIANS ARE EMOTIONALLY ATTACHED TO THE F-1 BECAUSE IT IS FRENCH. DUTCH SPEAKING BELGIANS, REACTING AGAINST THIS BLIND LOYALTY TO FRANCE AND THINGS FRENCH AND SEEING THAT THE F-16 IS BETTER AND CHEAPER, FAVOR THE AMERICAN PLAN. THE GOVERNMENTAL AND OPPOSITION PARTIES ARE
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SPLIT ON LINGUISTIC LINES. THE ATMOSPHERE IS CHARGED WITH

EMOTION AND SUBJECTIVITY.

2. IT WILL NOT BE EASY FOR THE GOVERNMENT TO DECIDE WHICH PLANE TO BUY. ANY DECISION WILL ALIENATE A SEGMENT OF THE POPULATION UNLESS THE GOVERNMENT CAN JUSTIFY ITS POSITION BY POINTING TO THE CHOICE OF OTHER CONSORTIUM COUNTRIES. IN THIS THE DUTCH ARE KEY. IN OUR JUDGMENT, IF THE NETHERLANDS DECIDES TO BUY THE F-16, SO WILL BELGIUM. BUT IF THE NETHERLANDS WAIVERS, BELGIUM WILL ALSO.

3. THUS, THE MEETING SCHEDULED FOR MAY 2 OR 5 BETWEEN THE DUTCH AND THE BELGIAN FOREIGN MINISTERS IS LIKELY TO BE CRITICAL. IN ANY CASE NO DECISION WILL BE TAKEN BY BELGIUM BEFORE THEN. TINDEMANS HAS RECENTLY RETURNED FROM POLAND AND WILL LEAVE TOMORROW MORNING FOR CHINA, TO RETURN APRIL 29.

4. MEANWHILE, THE ISSUE IS BEING CONSIDERED BY THE SENATE AND CHAMBER OF DEPUTIES COMMISSIONS OF NATIONAL DEFENSE. THEY HAVE BEFORE THEM A REPORT PREPARED UNDER THE GUIDANCE OF VANDEN BOEYNANTS. IT IS A SKILLFUL, PRO-FRENCH DOCUMENT. FACTS AND INTERPRETATIONS ARE TWISTED AND DISTORTED TO PORTRAY THE MIRAGE IN THE BEST POSSIBLE LIGHT WHILE COATED WITH APPARENT OBJECTIVITY. WE ARE TOLD THAT THE COMMISSIONS ALSO HAVE THE REPORT OF THE CONSORTIUM STEERING COMMITTEE. IF SO, AND IF IT IS READ, OUR CASE WILL HAVE BEEN FAIRLY MADE. A REPORT OF THE DELIBERATIONS OF THE DEFENSE COMMISSIONS WILL FOLLOW.

5. UNTIL NOW THE EMBASSY AND THE MAAG HAVE BEEN ACTIVELY AND OPENLY PRESENTING THE CASE FOR THE F-16 TO POLITICIANS, OFFICIALS, AND REPORTERS. HOWEVER, NOW THAT THE ATMOSPHERE IS CHARGED WITH EMOTION AND POSITIONS ARE BEING TAKEN ON THE BASIS OF LANGUAGE AND COMMUNITY ATTACHMENT RATHER THAN FACTS AND ANALYSIS, WE HAVE DECIDED TO PLAY IT A BIT MORE CONSERVATIVELY.

6. IN ANY EVENT, THERE IS NOT MUCH NEW THE U.S. G. CAN
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DO. BUT WE SHOULD TAKE CARE NOT TO MAKE MISTAKES. IT IS PARTICULARLY IMPORTANT THAT THE U.S. NOT TAKE ACTIONS IN OTHER APPARENTLY UNRELATED AREAS THAT WILL UNITE THE BELGIANS (AND EUROPEANS) AGAINST US. THIS IS NO TIME FOR A MAJOR AMERICAN FIRM TO WITHDRAW FROM BELGIUM OR TO CUT EMPLOYMENT. ANY SUCH STEP WOULD ENABLE THE PROPONENTS OF THE MIRAGE TO POINT OUT THE UNRELIABILITY OF AMERICAN

INVESTMENT. IT WOULD BE EQUALLY INOPPORTUNE FOR THE
U.S. GOVERNMENT TO TAKE COUNTERVAILING OR ANTIDUMPING
ACTION OR OTHERWISE TO INCREASE TRADE PROTECTION AGAINST
ANY OF THE CONSORTIUM COUNTRIES. (COUNTERVAILING ACTION
ON CHEESE WOULD HAVE A MINOR IMPACT IN BELGIUM BUT WOULD
ENGAGE DUTCH AND DANISH INTERESTS. COUNTERVAILING ACTION
ON GLASS OR STEEL WOULD BE DEEPLY RESENTED IN BELGIUM
AND WOULD BE USED AGAINST US.) FIRESTONE

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